

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, August 13, 1876, with transcript

Copy of letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Miss Mabel Hubbard, dated Brantford, Ontario, Monday, August 13, 1876 Brantford, Ontario Monday, August 13, 1876 My darling May,

My thoughts are flying Cambridgewards this morning — and I long to be with you.

I only wish that the intervening space between us would vanish “like the baseless fabric of a dream and leave not a wrack behind” ... But facts are stubborn things — and space persists. Railroads and steamboats may cut it down one half — Telegraphers may ignore it altogether — but alas to flesh and blood it still remains a hard impenetrable fact — dark and opaque.

Would it not be splendid if we could only annihilate space for our bodies as we do for our minds — and flash ourselves from place to place — just as the thought comes? Would it not be grand — if some lucky inventor should hit upon Lytton's “Vrill Force” and inaugurate a new epoch and “The Coming Race”?

Such times I fear are not for us — and so Cambridge remains in the distance to me — a beacon-light on my horizon — and I must content myself with the knowledge that each succeeding day will bring me nearer, — and indulge myself with the hope of seeing you before another week is out.

We leave here tomorrow afternoon for Hamilton — then proceed to Toronto — and down the rapids to Montreal. From there it is not unlikely we shall proceed to Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks. It can't be very long now before Cambridge makes its appearance — and then — !?

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Imagination must bridge the gap — for I can't finish the sentence in any way that is satisfactory to myself — and I can only say that I shall be very glad to get back to you once more and tell you the old old thing that you know so well — that I love you far more than I can possibly tell you. Now there I've just spoilt a rhyme! — “well & tell”! Had I only managed properly I might have written to you in verse instead of plain prose. However I'm averse to doing so — and yet I don't want to make my letter prosy either. I shall therefore steer a middle course — and do just as my fancy leads me.

Our visit to the chief Smoke Johnson on the Tuscarora Reserve was a very pleasant one. His wife is English — quite a refined and cultivated lady — and his family — (especially his daughters !) would rank in beauty and accomplishments with any in the land.

Chief Johnson or “On-wan-on-sys-hon” as he is called — i.e. “The man who lives in a large mansion” — must have been a very handsome man in his younger days — judging from his photographs — but now his appearance is anything but prepossessing. He has incurred the hatred of some of the members of one of the tribes — and has been twice assassinated.

There is a large hollow on the top of his head where his skull has been beaten in. His lower jaw has been broken in two places. His right hand has been 2 smashed and he has been shot right through the body — the bullet going in at one side and passing out at the other — and yet the man lives — in perfect and robust health — and with few marks of the terrible injuries he at one time sustained. The surgeon's art has restored to him his hand in such perfect shape that you would never suspect that it had been injured were it not for the fact of his shaking hands with his left hand. A beard covers the deformities of his mouth with the exception of his teeth — so that altogether he has been pieced together into a very respectable looking morsel of humanity. The Indians have given him a new name meaning “The man with nine lives”.

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I have taken quite a fancy to his son Karihowanea (That is “The first who has risen amongst us”). He is very handsome — well-educated — and quite a musician! He holds an important position in the Mutual Life Insurance Co. of Canada and is located in Hamilton.

But what shall I say about his lovely daughter Kayenondys-hon “(A voice floating upon the wind”) and her accomplished sister Karahawenea (“One who directs the sun's pathway”)?

Perhaps the less I say the better — at least to you!

They are certainly both charming — and the younger one (who is about seventeen — “sweet seventeen”) — is especially beautiful — only less so than Berta and Grace.

Onwanonsyshon's other son Wawanosh (“something floating in the air”) was absent in Hamilton so I did not see him.

Onwanonsyshon took me into his private room and dressed me up in full Indian-chief costume! I wore his buckskin coat covered with silver brooches made by the Indians from silver-coins — chiefly shillings — half-crowns and crowns. Upon the breast of the coat hung various medals — and on my head was placed his hat of Eagle's wing and Ostrich feathers — which brought my height pretty nearly up to eight feet.

Dressed in full costume and with a tomahawk in my hand I stalked majestically into the room where all were seated — frightening my mother nearly out of her senses.

The chief's house is full of curiosities of all kinds — the description of which I must leave until I can tell you by word of mouth.

On Saturday Karihowanea failed me — but his father Onwanonsyshon met me instead. We spent a pleasant afternoon together in town — he dined at the Kerby House with me and after dinner we smoked the pipe of peace together in the smoking room while he told me something of the history of his life, and how he came to court an English lady instead

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of one of his own race. But all these things I must tell you when I see you as paper and time have failed me — for the carriage waiteth.

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There were several Indians in town — and as I thought you would like to see what our Indians are like in their full-dress costume — I have had a photograph taken of a great Indian Chieftan and his squaw for your express benefit. It is well you are not here for you would be sure to fall in love with him — I hope you will like his picture when you see it — for it was taken specially for you — and he is specially anxious to know what you think of him!

Look out for it in my next.

With ever so much love Your own ALEC